



War and English Poetry: From old English to modernism

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ABSTRACT

War has been the first and oldest subject of literature if not the only at times. This study will navigate the readers around the genre of war poetry in the historical and literary context: starting from the Old Times to early Modern Age, that is, to the Great War in British literature. The significance of war poetry lies not just in its historical value, but also in its contribution to the main trend of English poetry. In Old English war literature showed itself in the form of epic dealing with various subjects as heroic legends. The Battle of Maldon is an Old English war poem celebrating the real Battle of Maldon of 991, at which an Anglo-Saxon army failed to repulse a Viking attack. In the Renaissance, the speaker in "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars" pleads for his lover to understand why he must leave the safe and sweet comfort of her presence and willingly fly to the battlefield. In the Age of Reason, Thomas Penrose in "The Field of Battle" allows his beloved to be in search of her lover's body on the battlefield among the dying and the dead. Tennyson in the Victorian Period through his "The Charge of the Light Brigade" honors the soldiers who without asking any question, or the reason behind the battle ride through the "valley of death" into the "mouth of death" and return no more. Moving to the modern period, the readers come across with the soldier poets who write in the trenches of their duty and bravery as well as the brutality of the war, mostly writing anti-war poems. All these poems lament on the horror, poignancy and futility of war.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humanity has always turned to poetry as the most perfect and powerful means of expression and communication in the highest level of emotion. If poetry is expected to be the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" then what area of human experience can generate powerful feelings more than war. War has been the first and the oldest subject of literature if not the only at times. It has been written to narrate and celebrate along with honoring the glories of those who sacrifice their life to make others live a life with dignity. In old times, war literature exposed itself in the form of epic: meant to be spoken out aloud by poets and bards. It dealt with such various subjects as myths and heroic legends, and religious tales as well. Epic was also used by peoples all over the world to transmit their traditions from one generation to another. These traditions frequently consisted of legendary narratives about the glorious deeds of their national heroes. A survey of literary history in different cultures will prove this claim that war was the subject matter of early writings. English literature begins with *Beowulf*, an ancient poem that

was transmitted orally by Anglo-Saxon bards for centuries before it was written down in eight centuries. *Beowulf*, the main character, has defeated the mortal enemy of the land, the monster Grendel, and thus has made the territory safe for its people; but the hero is mortal and wheel of fortune has a tragic destiny in his stock for him. Ancient Greek literature starts with and boasts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer whose writings recount the story of his great heroes Achilles and Odysseus to reveal their true nature along with their tragic and heroic qualities. His characters are mortal and have their own flaws to make them fall. Persian literature also starts with Ferdowsi's (933-1020) *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*), the world's longest epic written by a single poet which covers the legends of fifty reigns in fifty chapters. The tragic story of Sohrab and Rostam (the father killing his son without his recognition) is familiar to English readers through Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* in the Victorian period. War poetry is not necessarily the experience of fighting men. With the exception of some soldier-poets' writings, huge amount of war poetry have been

written by men or women who have not directly experienced the front and war poetry hence is not personal suffering made into art. Although the great poets were not in the grip of war fever, it was their poetry which had been read by, or taught at school to, the generation of young people destined to be the casualties or survivors of the Western Front (Barlow, 2002: 12). We have to wait for the early modern age to witness the poets writing in trenches and the expression of "war poets" in English literature mostly refers to the poets who wrote during and about the First World War. This article will navigate its reader around the genre of war literature in its literary and historical context beginning with the Old English continuing to the modern period by introducing the major poet with his major poem, although women's poetry requires a separate chapter in the field.

2. Old English

From the first to the fifth century, England was a land for the Roman Empire and was named *Britannia* after its Celtic-speaking inhabitants, the Britons. The Britons adapted themselves to Roman civilization. The withdrawal of the Romans during the fifth century to protect Rome from falling by the Germanic invaders left England vulnerable to seafaring invaders of the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes (Norton, 2006: 4). The name *English* derives from the Angles, and the names of the counties Essex, Sussex, and Wessex refer to the territories occupied by the East, South, and West Saxons. The Anglo-Saxons invaders brought with them a tradition of oral poetry because nothing was written down before the conversion to Christianity.

The Britons became Christians in the fourth century after the conversion of Emperor Constantine. Christianity was present in the remote areas where the pagan Anglo-Saxons had failed to penetrate. In the following centuries, the Island was more predominantly Christian and started to produce many distinguished churchmen such as Bede whose Latin *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, which tells the story of the conversion and of the English church completed in 731 (Ibid).

In the ninth century, the Danes invaded the Island sacking Bede's monastery among others. Such a raid later inspired *The Battle of the Maldon*, by an anonymous writer, the last of the Old English heroic poems. The Danes occupied the northern part of the Island but they were stopped by Alfred, king of the West Saxons who united all the kingdoms of southern England.

The Battle of Maldon is the name of an Old English poem of uncertain date celebrating the real Battle of Maldon of 991, at which an Anglo-Saxon army failed to push the Viking attack back. Only 325 lines of the poem survive and both the beginning and the ending are lost. The

poem, as a celebration of pure heroism, is entirely told from the perspective of the English and the individuals were real Englishmen.

The poem narrates how the Vikings landed near Maldon in Essex and demanded tribute. Byrhtnoth, the Leader of the Essex (whose name means 'bright courage') angrily refuses, telling the messenger that he will fight the heathen Vikings in defense. Byrhtnoth who was confident of his strength allowed the Danes to cross the causeway before joining the battle. But he is killed in the battle and the Saxons flee, led by Godric. Aelfin, another commander, endeavors to draw the Saxons together to rejoin the fight but they continue to fall and the fragment breaks off at this point (Head, 2006: 78). The poem is heroic and archaic in character. It relates the actions of the individuals and presents short speeches of encouragement and boasting. Its presentation of characters and values recalls *Beowulf*. Nothing is gained by the battle: Byrhtnoth "so distinguished a servant of the Crown and protector and benefactor of the Church" lies dead alongside so many of his men, and the tribute is paid shortly after. Apart from the senselessness and futility of the battle, the poem verifies that fact that how a nation bears up when something goes wrong in one's homeland.

3. The Renaissance

Renaissance (meaning rebirth) refers to the period of European history following the Middle Ages. It is usually believed to have begun in Italy in the late fourteenth century, but it came to England late in the sixteenth century. Professor Abrams attributes four new things to the Renaissance: New Learning of the classics, the New Religion of the Reformation, the New World of a new continent, and the New Cosmos of Copernicus (1993: 17789). This period embraces the Elizabethan Age (1558-1603), the Jacobean Age (1625-49), the Caroline Age (1625-49) and finally the Commonwealth Period (1649-1660) (Head, 2006:930).

Richard Lovelace (1618-57) was a cavalier poet of the Renaissance who fought on behalf of the King during the Civil War. The term *Cavalier* refers to supporters of the King Charles 1 of England (1625-49) against Parliament. Cavalier courtiers wrote graceful, polished, witty, even brazen lyrics celebrating love, women, and gallant action. These poets were also called Caroline poets (Murfin & Ray, 2003: 51). (*Caroline* is an adjective derived from the Latin for Charles). As the *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* puts it, Richard Lovelace was the handsome and dashing son of a wealthy Kentish knight who gained a romantic reputation in the eyes of his

contemporaries. At the age of 18, he was granted an honorary MA from Oxford and stood out as a courtly gentleman and a gifted amateur of both music and painting. In 1639-40, he took up arms for his king in the Bishop's War. Lovelace lived at a time when the English monarchy was under violent attack from the Parliament. In 1644 when the Parliament challenged the King's authority, he supported the "Kentish Petition" that urged the restoration of the king to his ancient rights (Norton, 2006: 1681). He fought in Holland for the French kind and upon his return to England he was imprisoned. There he gathered and revised his poems, which later published under the name of *Lucasta*. During the civil war he was again imprisoned in 1648 for nearly a year and when he was released in April 1649 the King had been executed and his cause seemed futile. He died at the age of 39 in 1657.

Lovelace is remembered mostly for his two lyrics: "To Althea, from the Prison" and "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars." His work shows the influence of both Johnson and John Donne. His lyrics express perfectly the best of the cavalier manner and spirit. The poem "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars", first appeared in 1649, is about a man who is leaving his lover behind in order to seek glory on the battlefield. In short, this is a very brief poem that Lovelace wrote about a man saying goodbye to his lover before heading to war. He pleads for his lover to understand why he must leave the safe and sweet comfort of her presence, begging her not think him unkind for going away. While he admits that he loves his mistress very much, he admits that he loves war even more, and he willingly flies to the battlefield.

The poem is a very simple comprised of three stanzas, each containing four lines. The poem also has a rhyming scheme of abab cdcd efef. The speaker, possibly Lovelace himself, since he was a soldier, addresses his lover throughout the poem.^[1] In the first stanza, the speaker is begging his lover not to think he is rude for leaving her. He says:

*Tell me not (Sweet) I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.*

The use of parentheses and the capitalization of the word "Sweet" in line one seems to be curious, although Lovelace was probably trying to address his lover her more intimately. He pleads with her, telling her not to think poorly of him after he leaves the tranquility that surrounds her and flies off into the brutal and violent world of war.

The second stanza takes on a different tone compared with the first. In this stanza, Lovelace admits that he is

devoted to someone else: war and chasing his foe:

*True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace^[1]
A sword, a horse, a shield.*

He tells her that he has taken a new lover, which is the first enemy he sees on the battleground. He will stalk this enemy, and due to his obligation as a soldier, he embraces his sword, shield, and horse with even greater faith than he did his lover for her. Again, Lovelace draws attention to religion with his use of the word "faith," showing his lover and his reader that the religion he now worships is not the woman he has left behind; faith comes first. The speaker now worships war. The poet uses alliteration in line six of the poem, repeating the "f" sound in the neighboring words. He has probably implemented this to put an emphasis on how eager the speaker is to get to the battlefield. The third and final stanza is a brutally honest confession to his lover. He reiterates:

*Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee (Dear) so much,
Lov'd I not Honour more.*

He tells his lover that once she realizes why he is leaving her, she will love and respect his decision. He then leaves her reminding her that he could not love her as much as he did if he did not love the glories of war more. The last two lines of the above poem is in addition to last lines of his "To Althea, From Prison" the most quoted ones from Lovelace:

*Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage*

These impassioned lines, though written from the prison, are on freedom, because his steely determination and loyalty are so powerful that nothing can confine his mind. Thus, Lovelace's war poems amalgamated with his faith become at the service of his King and his homeland.

4. Augustan Age (The Eighteenth century)

Augustan Age in English literature refers to the first of the 18th century, during which English poets such as Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) emulated Virgil, Ovid, and Horace, the great poets of the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BC-14AD) (Alexander, 2000: 173). The Enlightenment is also another name given by the historians of ideas to a phase succeeding the Renaissance and followed by

Romanticism (ibid. 1740). In this age the novel arrived and the age favoured toleration in religion.

The eighteenth century, as Richardson (2014) puts it, was also a period of war when Britain and its great competitor, France, faced each other in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the American War of Independence (1775–1783), and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1798). These were wars for power in Europe, and for the annexation of territory later in the world.

Thomas Penrose (1742–1779) was the eldest son of Thomas Penrose, rector of Newbury parish who matriculated at Wadham College of Oxford. After 1769, he left the university and enlisted as a soldier in the British capture of Nova Colonia, South America, and took part in the last disastrous conflict of the Seven Years' War (Wikipedia, 2019). The main ship, named *Lord Clive*, caught fire, "by some unknown accident," and was swiftly engulfed in flames. In the meantime, the enemy's cannon fire continued and increased, killing many of those trying vainly to save themselves in the water (Richardson, 2014). A number of brave British seamen, unable to swim and facing certain death, spent their last moments maintaining a return fire against the Spanish. Penrose was wounded fatally in a naval battle and never fully recovered. He returned to England and took holy orders and settled at Oxford.

Thomas Penrose's small bulk of poetry is about war, both of its time and of its author. Influenced by the horror of the naval battle, Penrose wished to glorify warrior courage and spirit. In the "The Field of Battle", Penrose created a new way of imagining war that was to be highly influential among later writers. He seems to have arrived at the poetic idea in the poem through a struggle to understand and reconcile contemporary martial ideas and images with his own personal feelings and experience of war.

"The Field of Battle" is different from other poems. In this poem a young woman called Maria is searching for her lover's body, Edgar, on the battlefield

The Field, so late the hero's pride,
Was now with various carnage spread;
And floated with a crimson tide,
That drench'd the dying and the dead!

(9-12)

Finally Maria finds Edgar's body wounded and killed in the conflict:

Her ghastly hope was well-nigh fled
When late pale Edgar's form she found,
Half-buried with the hostile dead,
And bor'd with many a grisly wound. (49-52)

Unable to bear the sight of her lover, Maria is left to worse than death and deepest night and leave the battlefield:

She knew – she sunk – the night-bird
scream'd,
– The moon withdrew her troubled light,
And left the Fair, – though fall'n she seem'd –
To worse than death – and deepest night. (53-56)

Penrose by his small bulk of poems sought to emphasize the pathos and poignancy of war and the sufferings it cause. The "The Field of Battle" remained popular throughout the Romantic period and was a model for many poems of the time such as for "The Wounded Huzzar" by Thomas Campbell and "Battle of Baltic" (Bainbridge, 2003:25).

5. Romanticism

Romanticism, according to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* (1992), is a literary movement, and profound shift in sensibility which took place in Britain and throughout Europe roughly between 1770 and 1848. It intellectually marked a violent reaction to the Enlightenment and politically it was inspired by the revolutions in America and France and Greece and elsewhere. Emotionally it expressed an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience (Drabble, 842). The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge is regarded to be as the inauguration of the English Romantic movement. The English romantic poets – Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Byron – were divided into two distinct generation, came from desperate backgrounds, differed sharply in their theory and practice, held conflicting political views, and in some cases disliked each other (Head, 2006: 956). What the English Romantics shared was a belief in the poet's mission which was the "institutionalization of the Imagination": the emergence of the poet as a person possessing a special kind of faculty which made him different from the others (ibid.). They assumed the mantle of prophets and seers.

From the fall of bastille on July 14, 1789 throughout the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars which ended with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo on June 18, 1815, English poets responded productively to war. As Bennett (2005) puts it, Blake's *The French Revolution*, passages of Wordsworth's the *Prelude* as well as a

number of his sonnets, Coleridge's *France: An Ode and Fears in Solitude*, Byron's *Napoleon's Farewell* and parts of *Child Harold*, and Shelley's *Henry and Luisa* are among the best known representatives of the poetic response. Thus war was the most important poetic subject of the age of the British life from 1793 until 1815 in which the dominant figures of "the beggar, the orphan, the widow, the sailor, and soldier and veteran, the country cottage . . . were largely derived from the war experience" (Bainbridge, 2003:2). Although, war was relatively unstudied subject in the literary and cultural milieu of English romanticism by the critics, poetry played a major role through periodicals and newspapers most poets reached the public. Philip Shaw (2000) claims to be the first of its kind to focus on the relations between warfare and literary culture of war years by publishing *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1793-1822* (Bainbridge, 2016). J.R. Watson (2003) by publishing his *Romanticism and War: A Study of British Romantic Period Writers and the Napoleonic Wars*, tried to write a straightforward account of the way in which the war of 1793-1815 was perceived by Romantic writers.

January 18, 1816 marks the end of the continental wars and William Wordsworth's *Thanksgiving Ode, January 18, 1816, With Other Short Pieces, Chiefly Referring to Recent Public Events* celebrates this national victory. In Greece, a victory ode used to celebrate the military victories of the nation by promoting national consciousness. The genre, according to the *Wikipedia* (2019) is called *epinikion* or *epinicion* celebrating the champion's return to his hometown (as in the Olympian or Pythian games). Thus the writer of this national song, speaking to the nation, authorities raises himself to be the national bard:

Mid the deep quiet of this morning hour,
All nature seems to hear me while I speak,
By feeling urged that do not vainly seek
Apt language, ready as the tuneful notes
That stream in blithe succession from the throats
Of birds, in leafy bower
Warbling a farewell to a vernal shower. (ll. 36-42)

Wordsworth in bardic voice focuses on the idea of "rational patriotism" and "moral triumph", two major sentiments the poet endeavored to inculcate to his readers (Lee, 2016: 179). "Moral triumph" signifies the reason why Wordsworth believes the British had won the battle.

The *Thanksgiving Ode* has been written in the form of the irregular stanza consisting of lines varying length and is structurally divided into 14 stanzas. As Lee argues stanzas 1 to 3 adopts an impassioned tone celebrating the national victory. Stanza 4 as a transitional section paves the way to stanza 5 to

examine the dark side of the war launched by France regime. Here the true meaning of war is given to the readers:

And thus is missed the sole true glory
That can belong to human story!
At which they only shall arrive
Who through the abyss of weakness dive. (83-6)

As Garrett argues, it is the very emphasis on the glory of the victory that leads many to miss the "sole true glory," the lesson of deep humility that even triumph in war teaches (Garrett, 2008:83).

From stanza 6 to 7 the tone of praise takes the place of chastisement, bringing in the celebratory mood of national victory through stanzas 8 and 9 introducing the commemoration in stanza 10. The cause of war is explained in stanza 12 accompanied by the gratitude to God because of this victory in stanza 13. The poem concludes in the church by celebration of the victory in stanza 14.

The *Thanksgiving Ode* reminds his readers that the celebration of the victory and ignoring the price a nation pays for that triumph is missing the point: "And thus is missed the sole true glory/ That can belong to human story." Wordsworth leaves the judgment to posterity. What was important for Wordsworth was the fact that he was giving expression to the powerful feeling that had aroused intense interest in him to both celebrate and chastise the war.

6. The Victorian Period

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times", As Charles Dickens described the early Victorian times (Dennis, 2001: 10). The Victorian age, or Post-Romanticism, covers the long reign of Queen Victoria, from her accession to the throne in 1837 to her death in 1901. The Victorian age was a period of dramatic changes and a time of scientific advancement and religious uncertainty in the light of Darwin's *Origin of Species* published in 1859 (Head, 2006: 1154).

Due to dramatic social changes, there are so many different varieties in the Victorian poetry of subject-matter, imagery, tone and diction that one must conclude that this multiplicity is in itself the chief characteristics of the Victorian poetry. Alfred Lord Tennyson spoke directly to his age, as an inspiring prophet and preacher committed to middle-class ideals (Zare-Behtash, 2008: 166).

During the Victorian period, Britain witnessed a significant series of campaigns which allowed its regiments to land on nearly different parts of the continents. At this time, Victorian Britain was the greatest power in the world. In the 1840s and 1850s the

army of the East India Company extended the borderlines of British rule in the Indian subcontinent and beyond into south-east Asia. By contrast, the only one war fought in Europe during Victoria's reign was the Crimean War of 1854–6 in which the Russian Empire lost to an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, France and Britain. The war was documented extensively in both written reports and photographs. The battle literally and historically survived in English literature by Tennyson's celebrated war poem of "Charge of the Light Brigade".

6.1 Lord Alfred Tennyson: "Charge of the Light Brigade"

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-92) was born Alfred Tennyson in Lincolnshire, England, the son of an alcoholic rural minister. When Queen Victoria made him a baron in 1883, he added the "Lord" to his byline. Tennyson began writing poetry at five, and when still in his teens collaborated with his brother Charles on *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827). As a student at Cambridge, he was unusual: he kept a snake for a pet, won a medal for poetry, and went home without taking a degree. He was the Poet Laureate of England for forty-two years. He published verses to express the important cultural, social and religious concerns of the Victorian public (Zare-Behtash, 2014: 249). Tennyson was the master of all English sounds. His talent for melody is the most recognizable characteristics. The poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is one of his celebrated poems through which the poet uses its language to recreate the sounds it is describing: the sounds are the noises of the battle, the battle signifying death "to mark a military blunder" (Armstrong, 1993: 316).

"The Charge of the Light Brigade" narrates the story of a group of soldiers riding on horseback, obeying a command of attack, through "the valley of death" into the "jaws of death" for about one and a half miles:

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldiers knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs not to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred. (9-17)

The soldiers are hit by the shots of shells of canons in front and on both sides of them. Still, they charge courageously forward "Into the mouth of hell / Rode the six hundred." The soldiers strike the enemy gunners with their unsheathed swords and charge at the enemy while the rest of the world looked on in wonder. They ride into the artillery smoke and break

through the enemy line, destroying their Cossack and Russian opponents. Then they return back from the offensive, if any survived:

They that had fought so well
Came through the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred. (45-49)

As the brigade ride "back from the mouth of hell," soldiers and horses collapse; few soldiers remain to make the journey back. The world marvel at the courage of the soldiers; indeed, their glory is eternal, definitely through the poem: the poem concludes that these noble men remain worthy of honor and tribute today:

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honor the charge they made!
Honor the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

The dactylic meter of the poem reminds the reader of the booming of cannon, starting with a heavy explosion at first that dies away slowly. The poem like any war poem requires courage, duty, death and honour and that is why the speaker asks his readers to honour both their glory and their wild attack made with unity and strength. It might seem strange that about the poem that the reader is not informed of the other half of the battle. This blunder, the cause of the war, belongs to both sides. The poet, however, tries to keep his readers sympathetic with the British soldiers.

The last vestiges of Victorian age were swept away by major wars; that is, the second Boer War (1899-1902), when Dutch farmers fought Britain for control of South Africa, and the First World War (1914-18).

7. The Twentieth century: Modernism

Queen Victoria's death in 1901 terminates the Victorian period and welcomes the arrival of a new century. The Boer war of (1899-1902) which was fought by the British to establish control over the Boer republics in South Africa, marked the beginning of rebellion against British imperialism. The British won the battle but it was a hollow victory because it inspired other colonies to rebel (Carte & McRae, 2001:319). The new age was a reaction against middle-class Victorian attitudes that was central to modernism which was already under way in the two decades before Queen Victoria's death in 1901 (Norton, vol.2, 2006: 1827). A pivotal figure between Victorianism and modernism is Thomas Hardy who

marks the end of the Victorian period and the advent of the new age.

7.1 Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), novelist and poet, did not go to a famous school or to university, but he was well educated. His father taught him violin, and his mother greatly encouraged his early interest in reading books. At the age of 21 he went to London to work for an architect, whiling completing his general education through his own readings. During this time he lost his religious faith and gave up architecture for writing novels and short stories (Drabble, 1992: 435). Hardy's novel, set in the context of "Wessex" show the forces of nature outside and inside individuals to shape their destiny (Norton, vol.2, 2006: 1851). Men and women in Hardy's novels are not masters of their own fate. At the end of nineteenth century Hardy abandoned writing fiction and turned to writing and publishing poetry. In 1998 Hardy published his poets under the name of *Thomas Hardy: Selected Poems* in the Oxford World's Classic series; thus, Hardy became the first poet of the twentieth century.

Hardy wrote some of the greatest war poems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: poems about soldiers, conflict, and matters military. "Drummer Hodge" is perhaps Hardy's most famous poem about war and soldiers for whom he is bemoaning. Published in 1901, "Drummer Hodge" was originally anonymous and the important thing about Hodge in the poem is that he *is* Hodge: far from being some anonymous soldier, he is granted a name and an identity. The word "Hodge" according to *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2002) "is a name for a typical agricultural labourer, a rustic," and had all demeaning connotation of "country bumpkin." Hodge is from Wessex participating in the Boer War. He is killed and buried in South Africa due to British imperialism which led to his death in South Africa. It was not important for Hodge who he is fighting with, what was important for him was the fact that he was defending the ideologies of the authorities of his country in defending his country.

Hodge was too young and innocent, and had not been in South Africa long enough when he died to know what these unusual constellations were, or to get to know the local territory. Yet Hodge, in being buried in an exotic spot, becomes part of the foreign land, and the territory has become part of him and every night the stars of the Southern hemisphere will shine over his grave:

Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge forever be;
His homely northern breast and brain
Grow to some southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally. (13-18)

The very structure of the poem with its ABAB rhyming scheme manages to create the theme of war drumming

signifying the poignancy and senselessness of war.

7.2 Rupert Brooke: "The Soldier"

Another poem about soldiers dying in service with which 'Drummer Hodge' might be compared and analysed, written after some fifteen years, is "The Soldier", written by Brooke shortly after the outbreak of another war, the great War:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. . . . (1-3)

The poem is a romantic sonnet and is deeply patriotic. It seems to celebrate the values of the liberal culture of Brooke and his contemporaries which sees death as a sacrifice which all young men should freely make for the sake of their country. Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) was educated at Rugby School and at King's College, Cambridge. When the First World War began he was commissioned as an officer into Royal Naval. On leave in December 1914 he wrote the "war sonnets" that were to make him famous as a war poet. Five months later he died of dysentery and blood poisoning on a troopship heading for Gallipoli, a seaport in South European Turkey (Norton, 2006: 1955). When the death of Brooke was announced in 1915, an obituary notice was written by Winston Churchill was printed in *The Times*:

..... The thoughts to which he gave
expression in the very few
incomparable war sonnets which he
has left behind will be shared by the
many thousands of young men
moving resolutely and blithely
forward into this, the hardest, the
cruellest, and the least-rewarded of
all that wars that men have fought.
They are a whole history and
revelation of Rupert Brooke
himself, joyous, fearless, versatile,
deeply instructed, with classic
symmetry of mind and body, ruled
by high undoubting purpose
quoted by Lyon, 2005: 56).

Churchill's notice reveals how useful poetry and poets had become to those involved in handling the war.

Brooke was the most popular poet of modernism, early decades of twentieth century, who infused nature with nationalist feeling and his early death "symbolized the death of a whole generation of patriotic Englishmen (Norton, 2006: 1955). "The Soldier" belongs to an earlier stage in the War, when people were overall more optimistic and patriotic. The poem captures the patriotic mood and takes a sonnet form associated with English poetry; that is, Shakespearean sonnet, although Brooke's form and structure is closer to the Italian than the

Shakespearean sonnet. (In short, an English sonnet is divided into three quatrains, with a concluding couplet, while an Italian sonnet is divided into an octave or eight-line unit, followed by a sestet, or six-line unit.) Nevertheless, the poem does reflect the Shakespearean sonnet by rhyming *ababcdcd* in the octave, whereas the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet rhymes *abbaabba*.

The patriotic message of the poem is evident in its repeated mention of 'England' and 'English' – six times in all. But a closer analysis of the poem reveals that it also offers subtler hints of its proud patriotism. For example, 'foreign', in the 'foreign field' of the second line, finds itself echoed into 'forever England'; even if he dies and goes to heaven, that heaven is also "English heaven". Thus being English will encourage them to giving their lives for a cause – courage, pride, pluck which will last forever. The very beginning of the poem shows the conspicuous theses of the poem:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be

In the rich earth a richer dust concealed: (1- 4)

The speaker is talking about his own death and then moving to 'dust' which makes us think of funerals and corpses. Hence, the soldier's body becomes a symbol for England. Brooke's use of first person pronoun *I* and *me* does not extend beyond the beginning of the poem, with the remainder of the poem personifies England. The 'individual' becomes first *A body of England* and then no more than *A pulse in the eternal mind* (Thorne, 2006:253). Brooke's war experience was different from others because he was in the navy while other war poets like Sassoon and Owen were in the trenches. The sacrifice their body in order their land survives and lasts.

7.3 Wilfred Owen: 'Futility'

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) another war poet was born in Shropshire, in the west Midlands of England, where his father was a station-master and started to practice writing verse from an early age. His mother was an evangelical Anglican who encourage her son to take an unpaid post as lay assistant to the vicar of Dunsden, teaching the Bible classes. In 1913, he abandoned this assistance to teach English in Bordeaux, in France. In 1915, Owen returned to England to join the army to become an officer in the Battle of Somme. He found his own voice in the trenches while he was the master of metrical variety and of assonance (Head, 2006: 838). He was injured and was sent to a hospital near Edenborough where to come to visit Siegfried Sassoon.

"Futility" was one of just five poems by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) that were published before his death, aged 25, on 4 November 1918. "Futility" is a war poem, a brief lyric that focuses on a group of soldiers standing over the dead body of a fallen comrade. The poem uses one of Owen's favorite techniques, that of pararhyme or half-rhyme (sun/unsown, once/France, seeds/sides, star/stir) alongside full rhyme (snow/know, tall/all) (Norton, vol.2, 2006: 1971). The plain language of the poem adds to the poignancy of the subject matter: the death of a soldier and the theme of futility:

Move him into the sun –
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown,
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know. (1-8)

The language used creates a mood of poignancy and by using the word "gently" it is more probable that the dead soldier may be a young boy, hoping that the sun will be able to wake him. The use of rouse is also interesting because it refers to a bugle callused in the war to get the soldiers out of bed.

The opening of the poem is hopeful and optimistic and wakes the seeds; but is it possible to stir the young man's body:

Think how it wakes the seeds –
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
– O what made fatuous sunbeam toil
To break earth's sleep at all? (8-14)

The sun which brought warmth is now helpless in stirring the precious body of the young soldier wasted in the war. The 'f' sounds of 'futility' and 'fatuous' add to the poignancy of the war as well as the futility of it. If the first stanza showed more purposeful and confident language: 'Move him into the sun', 'Always it woke him', 'The kind old sun will know'. The second stanza begins in a similarly confident manner – with the imperative, 'Think how it wakes the seeds' – but this confident voice disappears in the ensuing lines, being replaced by the angry use of blunter questions.

8. CONCLUSION

Thomas Hardy's "The Man He Killed" can best serve as the conclusion section of this article, when his speaker reiterate how strange and unusual was is:

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!

You shoot a fellow down
 You'd treat if met where any bar is,
 Or help to half-a-crown."

The speaker recalls a time when he shot a man in a war, the man he killed was a man like him. He regrets that if they had already met each other at a bar, instead of standing face to face on the battleground, they could have a chat and even "sat down to wet / Right many a nipperkin!" The important point is that none of them have a good reason to participate in the war:

"I shot him dead because —
 Because he was my foe,
 Just so: my foe of course he was;
 That's clear enough; although

The repetition of the word "because" and "just" show the hesitation of the man and neither of them hated the other. They are on the front line but taking the order from those in the back and it is their duty to follow them in charge.

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